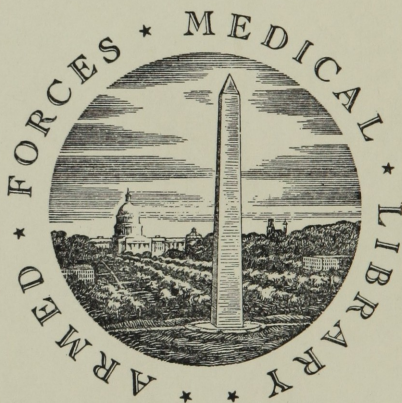


UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



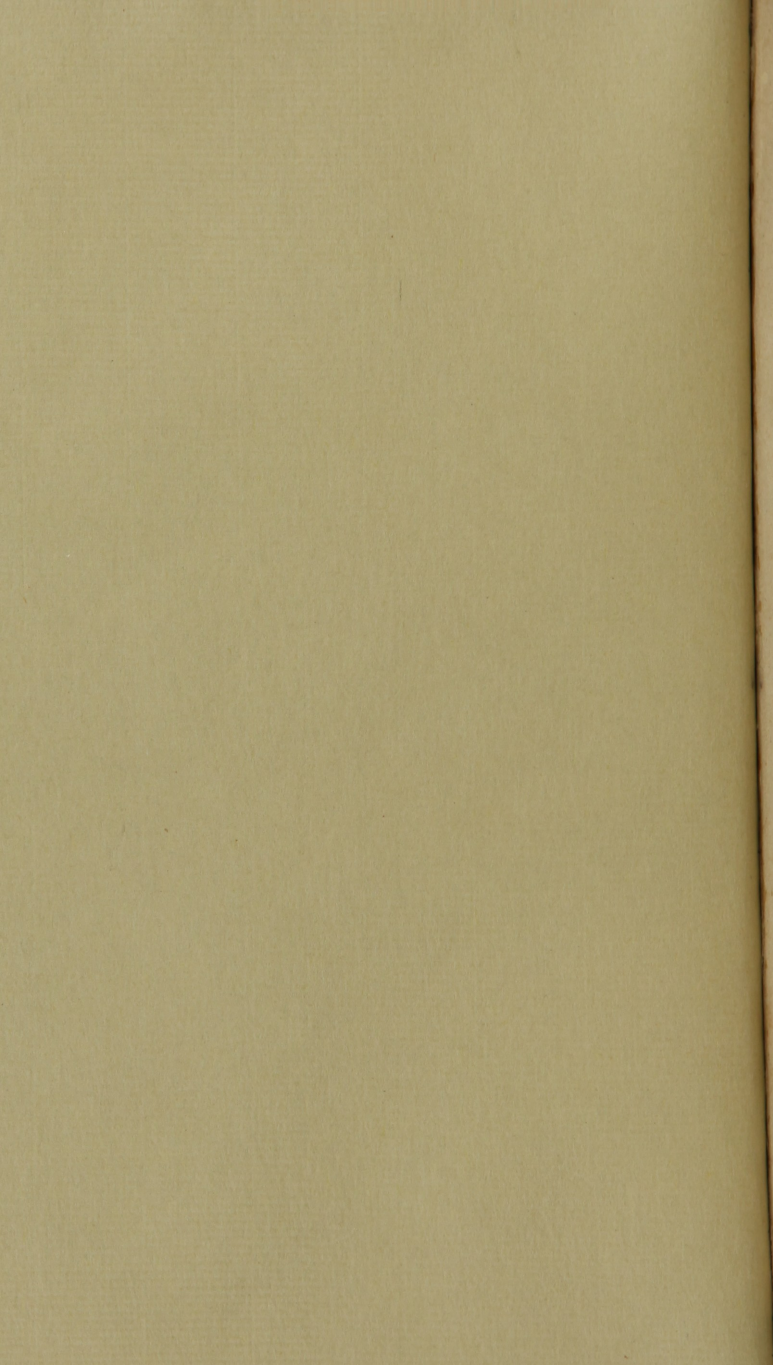
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WASHINGTON, D.C.









*Liddell (J.) No 1301*  
**REPORT**

OF

**THE COMMITTEE**

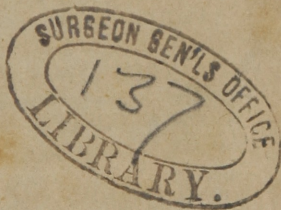
**APPOINTED TO INVESTIGATE THE CAUSES AND**

**EXTENT OF THE LATE EXTRAORDINARY**

**SICKNESS AND MORTALITY**

**IN THE**

**TOWN OF MOBILE.**



**PHILADELPHIA :**

**PUBLISHED BY S. POTTER AND CO.**

**NO. 55, CHESNUT-STREET.**

**1820.**

**1301**

REPORT

OF

THE COMMISSION

ON THE INVESTIGATION OF THE CAUSES AND

EFFECTS OF THE LATE CHOLERA

IN INDIA AND MORTALITY

IN 1817

BY

JOHN H. MANNING

OF THE

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H. MIFFLIN, PRINTER.



# REPORT.

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*The Committee appointed to investigate the causes and extent of the late extraordinary sickness and mortality in this town,*

## REPORT :

That they have carefully attended to the duties assigned them, and have examined all the wharves, the docks, and vessels, the buildings and lots near the river, as well as in other parts of the town, and find in their examination numerous local causes, which, under the co-operating influence of the late season, might, in their opinion, have produced the fever, independent of the supposition of its foreign importation.

Some of the most prominent we will mention, and first, the condition of the wharves, built with hewn timber, closely laid, confining the water within the outward dimensions of the wharves, and filled up with rotten logs, bushes, shavings, and other vegetable matter, covered lightly with swamp mud or earth, presenting to view an immense mass, in the most noxious state of decay. Two of these wharves, about 450 feet in length, and 30 to 40 in breadth, were commenced in the spring, and the work of filling them up with logs, mud, and bushes, was carried on during the summer, till the storm on the 28th July, and the sickness of the workmen put a stop to it. They were, however, nearly filled up to the length and breadth mentioned, and to the depth of four to ten feet, and the surface of about a third part covered with pieces of swamp marsh, cut in convenient sizes for the purpose, and marsh mud. When the committee viewed these wharves, the sight was most disgusting, and the smell so offensive, that they felt their health endangered by delaying about them.

The other wharves, five in number, also deserve a more particular notice. Three of them appear to be built upon the plan of the former; and with like materials, two are partly built upon piers, giving a more wholesome circulation to the water. One was built during the spring and summer, but chiefly destroyed by the storm of July, the others from one to four years since, each of them, affording a mass of decaying vegetable matter, from 200 to 400 feet in length, 25 to 30 in breadth, and 3 to 10 in depth, covered with a thin layer of earth,



or mud. Such a quantity of noxious materials collected together in a state of decay, must necessarily produce miasmata, and mortal disease.

Water street is also observed to be filled up with the same kind of materials, in many places to the depth of from 4 to 6 feet, and computed together might afford a mass of such matter, several hundred feet in length, and fifty in breadth, thinly covered with earth. The lots adjoining this street, on one side, are found to have been chiefly filled up with rotten logs, green pine sapplings, and pine tops, with a thin layer of earth, and might comprise more than an acre of ground, thus filled from one to two feet; and on the water side, the docks are observed to have been much clogged up with timber, drift logs, and old boats, which during the low summer tides, and north wind, collected together in the docks, great quantities of seaweed, and other filthy matter, in a state of decay, particularly under the stores standing over the water. The prevalent north wind, and low tide, during the months of September and October, left the docks, and a large extent of marsh mud about them, exposed to the heat of the sun, and the water, variously obstructed about the docks and wharves, became itself stagnant and offensive.

The committee also observe that many old boats, or barges, damaged during the storm on the 28th July, were suffered to remain filled with water, as well as the schooners Sally and Piper, at the wharves south of the fort, during the months of August, September, and October, even to the time the committee visited them. The water in these boats and vessels, we scarcely need to add, was in a most putrid and offensive state. Several lots upon Water street were suffered to remain covered with stagnant water, filled up with old rotten logs, old casks, bushes, and, in short, seem to have been receptacles for refuse and offal substances of every kind.

The badly constructed foundations of the stores and buildings near the river, retaining beneath them much unwholesome matter, or stagnant water, affecting the inhabitants with their deleterious damps and effluvia, must have proved a fertile source of disease, under the influence of the late season.

To these causes we must add, the general condition of the back yards and enclosures in the town. All the prudential measures of an effective police seem to have been totally abandoned, and the committee are compelled to say, that every part of the town presented a striking proof of the extreme neglect of a large portion of our citizens to the ordinary duty they owe themselves and their neighbours—that of keeping

their yards and possessions clear from every species of filth, which may be injurious to health. Ponds of water in various parts of the town were suffered to remain, undrained after the rains, and became stagnant, thus affecting the air with poisonous exhalations. Dead animals, heaps of oyster shells, and other offensive matter, were commonly observed through the town. Weeds were cut down, and suffered to decay without removal. A store upon one of the new wharves contained a large quantity of hides during the months of August and September, and the greater part of October, in a most offensive state—such an outrage against the health of the inhabitants is scarcely credible.

In this general state of the town, succeeded the violent hurricane of the 28th and 29th of July, from the S. and S. E. which raised the water to an uncommon height, overflowing all the wharves, and the foundations of the buildings on Water Street, even to the height of several inches in many store rooms; leaving, as the water subsided, a vast quantity of logs, drift wood, sea-weed, and other vegetable matter in the streets and lots, much of which was there suffered to decay and infect the air. The docks were clogged up with like materials, and damaged barges and vessels. No attention whatever seems to have been paid to cleaning the docks after the storm, to give a free circulation to the water, too much confined before by the mode of building wharves.

The committee feel much regret that they are compelled, in discharge of the duty assigned them, to present such a view of the town anterior to, and immediately after the storm in July; but the facts were obvious to all, whether citizens or strangers, and evince an almost unparalleled indifference in regard to our own health. In such a state of our town, the most strenuous advocates for foreign importation of the yellow fever, will surely admit that there existed abundant causes for less malignant fever.

But we have to add to the causes enumerated, the potent influence of a most unprecedented season. The last winter was generally moderate, very dry, and less severe than usual. The rivers Alabama and Tombecbe scarcely reached the height of their banks; during the winter, not more than half the quantity of rain fell. The spring was cool and chilly; in March, a severe frost, which killed the early garden beans, corn, and other tender plants.—April, May, and the earlier part of June, afforded light falls of rain, very seasonable for vegetation: winds generally S. and S. West. June and July were uniformly hot, greatest heat 92 degrees. The storm of July 28, terminated a long



drought, and deluged the whole country around ; all the lesser rivers and creeks overflowed their banks to the height of winter floods. From the 28th of July to the 11th of September it rained without a day's intermission : and often descended in torrents. All the neighbouring swamps, and low grounds about the town, were filled with water to a height unexampled at that season of the year. The sun at times burst forth with sultry, suffocating heat. The brick walls, houses, furniture, books, and clothing, all became mouldy, and the latter required frequent sunning to preserve them from destruction.

On the evening of the 10th September, it cleared off, wind N. W. with hot sun, and so continued for 66 days, to November 16th, the wind varying from N. W. to N. and N. E.—during the whole of this period, there was scarcely rain sufficient to lay the dust in the streets : in November, however, the wind was occasionally S. and S. W.—The effect of such an unexampled series of weather, such an excessive drought following a flood of rain, in the month of August, with the influence of the combined causes afore-mentioned, upon the human constitution, as exhibited in this town, the committee will carefully relate. During the previous winter, spring, and summer, to the first of July, the town was healthy, and no unusual sickness appeared. In the latter part of July, a number of violent cases of bilious fever occurred among persons unaccustomed to the climate, and some of a more questionable character. Several persons employed as workmen, in filling up one of the new wharves, were taken violently ill, and died after a short illness of two or three days. About the same time two persons, usually employed about Dauphin street wharf, were taken in like manner, and died, after a short illness. A number of carpenters and sailors employed about the wharf south of the fort, and were much on board the schooner Sally, filled with stagnant water, and the steam saw-mill, where there was a pond of like offensive water, were taken with violent fevers, and several of them died ; but as the physicians who attended all the persons alluded to, are dead, the particular symptoms of the fever cannot be well ascertained. It is, however, known, that Dr. Lawton, one of the attending physicians, spoke of these cases as malignant fever. Soon after these cases occurred, Snyder, an engineer, at work on a steam-boat, at the same wharf, died with violent symptoms of fever, after an illness of five days. Plank, who attended Snyder, and employed at the same place, and a Dutch servant boy, who lived in the house where Snyder died, were a few days after taken with like symptoms of fever, and died on the third or fourth day. All these cases, were, by the



attending physicians, (now dead) declared cases of yellow fever, and it is in evidence to the committee that they died with *black vomit*. Snyder died on the 7th August, and Plank on the 9th, several other cases occurred about the same time among the workmen, at one of the new wharves, and terminated fatally, after a short illness. At the two wharves mentioned, the first unequivocal cases of the yellow fever made their appearance, and about the same time, other cases occurred, which terminated fatally, with persons usually about the stores, near the wharves and river, about the same period. A young man of the name of Carson died on the 26th August, after an illness of 48 hours, with unequivocal symptoms of yellow fever, he occupied a store near the river and the wharves. Ellsworth died on the 5th September, after an illness of about 48 hours, and 17 days after the arrival of the sloop Patriot, from the Havana, in which he came passenger from that place. He also occupied a store near the river and wharves.

But as there are persons who strenuously maintain an opinion that the fever was imported into this town from the Havana, in the above named vessel, the committee have given the subject diligent attention, and have examined a number of persons, and taken their examinations in writing, particularly the officer of the customs, who first visited the vessel, and a sailor, who was on board the vessel during the voyage. The vessel arrived at the wharf, direct from sea, on the 19th of August, after a passage of 15 days from Havana. The officer states that "he was the first person on board the Patriot after her arrival—that he examined her cabin, hold, and cargo—that the cabin and hold of the vessel appeared, from any thing he could discover, in a pure and wholesome state. Sixteen bags of coffee, however, were wet, and considerably damaged, and some fruit rotten; the rest of the cargo in good order—that he attended the unlading of the cargo three days: the master, passengers, and crew appeared to be in good health, excepting Graham, a seaman, and the cook, who appeared to have had a fever—Graham was able to do duty on board—the cook not much unwell—that the vessels which arrived at Mobile during the months of June, July, and August, were generally healthy—no vessel, except the Patriot, arrived from a West Indian port. The schooner M'Donough arrived the 17th of July, from Nassau, N. P." He further states that "he took care of Snyder and Plank during their illness, and assisted in burying them—that the attending physicians, Lawton and Robinson, pronounced their disease *yellow fever*, both

before and after their deaths—that they both died with *black vomit* on the third or fourth day.”

Graham, the seaman, states that “he shipped on board said sloop at New Orleans, and was on board when she sailed from Mobile—nine persons were on board outward, four of which were passengers, one passenger died at the Havanna three days after he arrived—had seven passengers on board when the vessel left Havanna—no person unwell when they left there, or during the voyage, excepting the cook and himself—the cook was sick all the time he was on board—was himself sick at Havanna, and went on board unwell—thinks he had not a malignant fever—took no medicine—had none on board—and that the passengers knew his situation when they came on board.”

From the most diligent enquiry in regard to the state of the town, and the cases of fever, which had existed before the arrival of the *Patriot*, the condition of that vessel, the passengers and crew, as well as the vessels which arrived from New Orleans and elsewhere, the committee are constrained to express their decided conviction, that the malignant fever which so recently afflicted our town, originated in the numerous causes they have mentioned, favoured by the destructive effects of the storm and the subsequent season. The effects of the change of weather on the 10th of September, were very obvious to all. In a few days after the wind changed to the northward, with a clear sky and hot sun, the fever made its appearance in different parts of the town in all its fearful, deadly type. On the 16th, 17th, and 18th, *thirty* persons are reported to have died. Alarm spread through the town, and those who could conveniently, left it. Many, however, remained, and those of the poorer class of people, who either lived in small, crowded, filthy dwellings, or even without any, frequenting the grog-shops near the wharves, lodging under the market-house, or other places exposed to the damps and vapours of the night. In addition to these circumstances, many of them were intemperate. Among this class of people, which embraces nearly all those who arrived in town from the public works on Mobile bay, the fever was observed to be dreadfully mortal—almost all of them died. Of more than a hundred discharged at those works, who came to Mobile, it is believed that very few are alive. At certain places in town, there was a continual succession of these people arriving, and passing to the grave. Regardless, through intemperance, of all the usual cautions for the preservation of health—they were often crowded into rooms with the dying and the dead, till they became them-



selves the victims of their temerity. We cannot doubt that this class of people greatly increased and spread the disease. The old cloaths, bedding, and such like articles, belonging to them were, after their death, thrown into the streets, or back yards, and there suffered to remain to infect the air with their poisonous effluvia.

The want of proper attention, nursing, and nourishment, to the sick (which could by no means be had) was a cause, ever to be lamented, of the great mortality attending the disease.

Medical aid, also, was often neglected till the disease had made a mortal progress beyond the power of medicine. In many cases medical aid could not be obtained when desired. Several of the physicians themselves were sick, and the others unable to attend the numerous calls for their assistance—hence, many perished without medicine, or physician.

The building used for a hospital for the poor was in the centre of the town, and probably contributed to spread wider the disease, and increase its malignity. *Fear* in many instances was observed to produce most unfortunate effects upon the patient, and defeated the intended operations of medicine.—Some, in dreadful apprehension of the disease, seemed to abandon hope of life, and sunk in death.

With all these causes for the increased prevalence and mortality of the fever, it plainly exhibited in its progress and various symptoms, the most malignant character. The number of those who recovered from an attack, between the 15th September, and 10th October, the period of its greatest prevalence, was small; though the number cannot be ascertained. After the latter period, as cooler weather advanced, the disease assumed a milder character, and more frequently yielded to the powers of medicine.

In its type and symptoms it seems to have exhibited no peculiar characteristic marks or effects to distinguish it from the yellow fever of other seasons and places, as described by physicians; unless it be the greater mortality which attended it, and that is believed to be justly attributed to the causes already mentioned. Patients died commonly in one, three, or five days after taken, with all the symptoms of decided yellow fever. In the character of the disease, all the physicians agreed, but different methods of treating it were practised.

The committee find difficulty in ascertaining “the extent of the sickness and mortality” with arithmetical exactness; although four of their number were continually in town, during the prevalence of the fever, and two others a considerable portion of the time. For a while the disease seemed to be



mostly confined to those employed about the river and wharves, but in a few days after the prevalence of north wind, and clear, hot sun, (September 10th,) it spread rapidly thro' the whole town, and from that date seems to have affected the Creole inhabitants, people of colour, and even slaves. It is also noticed to have been equally mortal with the female, as the male population; though the former might be supposed less exposed to the influence of the general causes of the disease, but they were, perhaps, oftentimes more exposed to the fever in their immediate attendance on the sick. The number of deaths from the first August to the tenth September, embracing every description of people, was estimated by the physician who attended the hospital, and the greatest number of the poor, and was probably better informed on the subject than any other person, at an average of one a day—forty souls. This may be nearly correct: and of this number it is ascertained that only nine were inhabitants of the town, or embraced in any estimate of our population. These persons are known to have died of various diseases incident to the climate, excepting five or six—who are supposed to have died of yellow fever. After the above period, the fever assumed the predominant type, and spread death and dismay. From the tenth of September to the termination of the fever in November, 113 died, (four not of fever;) making the number of our inhabitants, who probably died of the malignant fever, 115. From July first to December first, the total number of deaths, including those who died out of town, and those who died by casualties, was 137. The number of boatmen, sailors, and workmen discharged from the public works, and transient persons, who died at Mobile, during the latter period named, is supposed, from the best information that can be obtained, to have equalled that of the inhabitants, giving a total of 274.

But to give an adequate idea of “the extent of the sickness and mortality,” it seems necessary to notice the population of the town at different periods of its prevalence; and here we must necessarily resort to conjectural estimates. In the month of July, the resident population of the town is estimated at 1,300 souls, and on the tenth September, 800, which were, in a few days after the known prevalence of yellow fever, reduced to 500, and it is to be remarked that a considerable portion of these were in the suburbs of the town, where the fever did not prevail.

But in a proportional view of the mortality to the population, exposed to the disease, the number of our citizens who died of other diseases antecedent to the prevalence of the fever, boat-

men, sailors, and other transient persons are to be deducted, which would shew the loss of our inhabitants by the recent fever to be 115 : and affords a proof of its dreadful malignity.

It was observed that the suburbs of the town, at no greater distance than one mile from the river, were as healthy, during the prevalence of the fever, as more distant parts of the country ; and it is not known that the disease was communicated, in any instance, to persons out of the town, by the removal and attendance of the sick. Hence we infer that the disease is only communicable in the atmosphere where it originated ; and even there, some pre-disposing causes appear to have been necessarily existing, as a number of persons frequently in rooms with the sick, the dying and the dead, in circumstances of the greatest exposure, never took the fever.

Some remarks upon the general state of the country around, in regard to sickness or health, being intimately connected with this subject, as influenced by general and common causes, may not be deemed improper. At New-Orleans, Baton-Rouge, Natchez, and perhaps, generally upon the Mississippi, as high as the latter place, the same species of fever seems to have prevailed with great mortality. Natches and New-Orleans, it is understood, have suffered beyond any former examples ; and in fact, almost all our cities upon the sea coast, from Main to Louisiana, appear to have suffered in a greater or less degree from the same species of fever ; though they were favoured by a long established and well regulated police.

In the interior of the country, upon the waters of the Tom-beche and Alabama, the sickness and mortality was greater than was ever known before. At St. Stephens, Jackson, Fort Claiborne, and other places on those rivers, bilious fevers, of the worst grade prevailed ; and in many instances we are warranted in saying, that in type and symptoms it differed little from the fever, which prevailed in this town.

The season has been a very uncommon one, and has produced as uncommon effects ; and wherever it has operated upon local causes, it appears to have produced malignant fevers. In the town of Mobile,\* art and labour could scarcely have combined a more destructive mass, for the production of malignant fever, under the operation of such a season, than is found to have been laboriously collected together in filling up lots, streets, and wharves : and the committee would do injustice to their own feelings, and their sense of the duty they owe their

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\* Limits of the town—three miles in circumference.



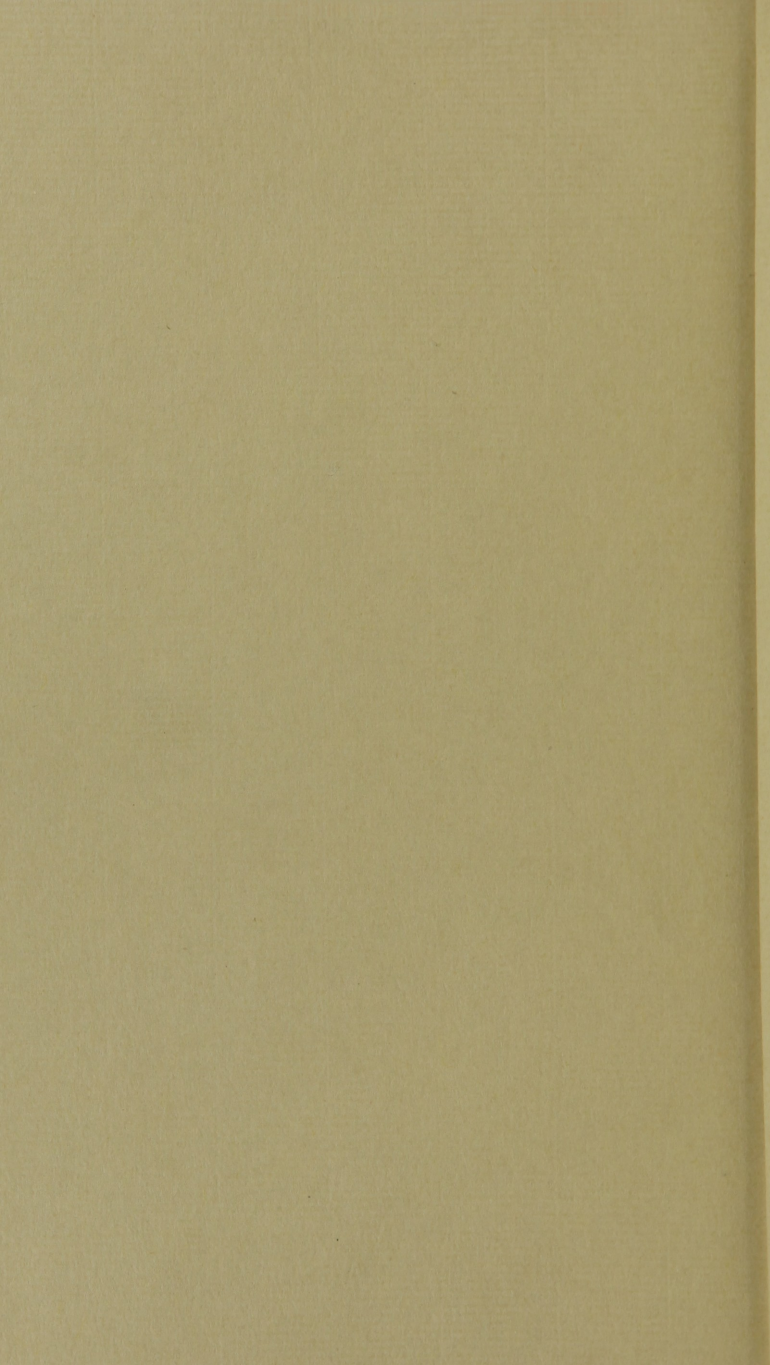
fellow-citizens, were they to suppress a warning voice of the danger that yet awaits them : if they be not zealous and active in removal of the numerous causes of disease, daily trodden under their feet, daily presented to their view. While they walk the streets, disease will assail them in every quarter, while they slumber in their beds, they will breathe the poison of death, until the yards and enclosures are cleansed—until the streets and wharves are radically reformed ; and then, by the blessing of God, we shall prosper in health.

JACOB LUDLOW,  
DAVID RUST,  
H. V. CHAMBERLAIN,  
ADDIN LEWIS,  
DR. MAJOR,  
EDWARD HALL,  
PHILIP M'LOSKEY.

} Committee.









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